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Producer Interview: Teak Underdue

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Industry Profile: Teak Underdue

By Kris Jones

I had the pleasure of interviewing music producer and Stockton, California native, Teak Underdue of Hallway Productionz. Teak and his brother Dee are 3X Grammy nominated producers for Best Rap/Rock Gospel Album of the year for *Bon-A-Fide* by T-Bone in 2007, Best R&B Album for Ledisi – *Turn Me Loose* in 2009, and Best R&B Album for Ledisi – *Pieces of Me* in 2012, and 2008 Dove award winner for Rap/Hip Hop



song of the Year for “Bone-Appetit!” by T-Bone. Teak and his brother Dee have a slew of producer credits working with artists such as Ice Cube, E-40, Miguel and Brandy, Tinashe, and Toni Braxton, as well as having their songs featured in various movies such as *xXx: State of the Union* and *Freedom Writers*, TV shows, *Gossip Girl* and *The Real World: Brooklyn*, and video games, including Tony Hawk’s *Proving Ground* and *Midnight Club: Los Angeles*. I sat down with Teak to learn more about his background and advice for making it in the industry as a music producer.

Tell me about your background and your career path.

I was born a musician. I started playing drums when I was 4 or 5 years old, bass when I was 12, piano when I was 16 and guitar when I was 19. I started learning to read sheet music for

percussion in elementary school. After that I learned to read bass clef for middle school jazz band at Hamilton and learned treble clef and music theory at Franklin High in Stockton CA., I began programming music on spare equipment my mother used for church. I used her old drum machines and sound modules to compose music. Soon after, I began composing music for local artists. In 1998, I began studying Biochemistry at UC Davis. As my talents grew, so did my reputation for making great beats. The local Stockton artists started becoming more well-known through their features on my productions. My cousin, Chief Xcel from the rap duo Blackalicious, hired me as a session musician in 2001. I reached out to more artists in the Bay Area & began working with those artists. After I graduated UC Davis in 2003, I caught the attention of LA rapper WC by 2004. In 2005, after hearing some beats on a CD, the legendary rapper/actor Ice Cube showed interest in recording to our music and after working with various artists we received our first Grammy Nomination in 2007, another in 2009 & 2012 & won a Dove Award in 2008.

What do you look for when you are hiring a [target job]?

I'm usually the composer getting hired. I look for artists to have a skill set on my level or higher. If my composition is better than the artist's skill level, then the song altogether will not be great. The artist has

to shine on any production. The rapping or singing has to be great and the songwriting has to be equally great. Lastly, I look for good pay in a target job. Sometimes the pay isn't great, but the


“The *artist has to shine* on any
production.”

opportunity can lead to better pay because the production value is great and the song I produce will be great, but sometimes the production is simple and the pay is great.

Is special training or education required/desired? If so, where is the best place to get such training?

It all depends on the production. Some Hip-Hop producers can use their DAW and produce great songs for many artists. The key to my career has been variety, skill and being eclectic.



*“The **key to my career** has been variety, skill, and being eclectic.”*

Sometimes my job requires me to be a musician for a session and sometimes I’m required to interpolate older works from the 1950s-1970s to create new compositions, or I’m required to

produce songs similar to current popular hip-hop artists. In all those cases, either a great ear for music is required or musical education and/or a knack for music production in various genres. In some cases, an education in music theory from High School will suffice. In other cases, just using your DAW and knowing popular sounds used to create is all you need to know. Some situations require you to know how to play musical instruments or have access to musicians to complete your production.

Is specific job experience required? If so, what kind? More importantly, how would you recommend getting such experience?

I would say experience is definitely required, but the amount of time varies. Experience is always gained through practicing your craft. In the case of music production, if you're asked to produce a pop song, you would have to have enough familiarity with the genre & sounds to pull it off. The same with Hip Hop music. The people with experience in each genre can tell if you actually know what you're doing. In

my case, I was asked to produce some pop music with a splash of EDM (electronic dance music) mixed in. I

was an experienced producer, but I

wanted to do a great job. I spent 2 months practicing pop and EDM production to get a better understanding of the genre. A less experienced producer would probably need to spend more time learning production before even tackling that genre.

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“Experience is always gained through
practicing your craft.”

Is there any way to break into this field without on-the-job experience?

Yes. Nepotism, or who you know. I don't prefer this, but it works for some people. If you display passion for producing music or for any job in the music industry, knowing someone will always help you break into the field. You might not even have the necessary skills, but that type of advantage will work. I personally think it's an unfair advantage, but that is how the world works, period.

Do you hire people in this capacity often? What's the supply-and-demand situation in terms of job seekers and available jobs in this field?

I am guilty of helping those I know. If I know a young artist personally and I feel like they deserve the help, I will definitely try to offer great advice or even offer production if they are talented enough. In terms of job availability, I would say that in the more developed metropolitan areas, there are better chances for jobs in terms of music production than smaller areas like Stockton. Due to technology I am able to work with various artists in the larger areas as an economic boost while still maintaining a presence in Stockton.

To what level can a person be hired at the entry-level advance?

For music production there is no entry level. You basically start to learn your craft and as you advance your skill level and build a great reputation you start your professional experience.

What is the usual starting salary range? After two years?

There is no real salary or income range. In a fairytale instance you could meet an artist that has a record deal after you've been producing for one year, have a hit song & make hundreds of thousands of dollars. In many instances young beat makers might only make a couple hundred dollars from beat sales annually.

Does your company offer internships?


We currently don't, but we recently opened a recording studio so it's possible that might change.

Can you suggest other companies or people to contact in your field?

[The Press Recording Studio](#) in downtown Stockton has an experienced staff and produces excellent quality recordings.

What is the most important attribute that someone wishing to enter the field today should possess?

Talent, hard work and patience. I started as a session musician while I was attending college at the age of 21. I received my first professional production credit at age 23, started working with Ice Cube at 25 and didn't get my first substantial checks until I was 26. Spending the time it


“Spending the time it takes to understand every genre of music takes years. **It takes hard work, talent and patience to actually accomplish it.**”

takes to understand every genre of music takes years. It takes hard work, talent and patience to actually accomplish it. You don't necessarily need all three attributes, but it helps. If a young beat maker is talented,

but not hard working they won't necessarily achieve success. If a young beat maker isn't necessarily talented, but hardworking they might actually work hard enough to become talented and achieve their desired goals.